

AVEC Vessels Arrived in Seward

By Amy Murphy.

A cost-saving move AVEC's board of directors approved in early 2010 came closer to fruition when AVEC's first set of tug-and-barges arrived in Seward in late August.

After passing sea trials in Texas, where they were built, the Cavek and AVEC-208 sailed more than 7,000 miles on its way to Seward, passing through the Panama Canal and rescuing a sailboat in distress off the California coast. The second tug-and-barge set, Naniq and AVEC-183, recently passed sea trials and is sailing towards Alaska.

Both sets of vessels will deliver fuel and freight to nearly all of AVEC's communities next year. The original plan called for vessels to deliver fuel this past summer, but unfortunately construction problems delayed completion of the vessels.

AVEC's board approved the plan to build these vessels to stabilize the cooperative's fuel and transportation costs for five years and also bring competition to Western Alaska's fuel-delivery market. The vessels will be chartered and operated for the term of the contract by Vitus Marine, LLC, a company managed by experienced Western Alaska mariners.

"Because of steep increases in transportation costs over the last few years, the board decided to invest in assets that will bring at least \$2.5 million in cost savings to the members who have seen drastic increases in energy costs since 2007," said Meera Kohler, AVEC's President and CEO.

After passing a Coast Guard inspection, the Cavek crew sailed to Dillingham, where they made their first fuel delivery. Vitus Marine plans to make other fuel and/or freight deliveries over the winter months. AVEC will hold a ceremony to bless the vessels next year before fuel delivery season.



The two tugs, Naniq and Cavek, are identical. The shallow-draft barges are similar but with different lengths and are named according to their length: AVEC 208 and AVEC 183. The barges can transport three different types of fuel in separate compartments and carry freight on the deck.



AVEC employee Amy Murphy went to Seward to tour the new vessels and take photos.



These vessels made their first fuel delivery of 1.1 million gallons to Nushagak Electric Cooperative in Dillingham, transferring four barge loads from a line-haul barge. The vessels can pump 34,000 gallons of fuel per hour. More information and photos are available on the Vitus Marine Facebook page.



Rick Ferroni, the ship's engineer, monitors a lot of the vessels' functions from this control panel in his room.



Some of the array of high-tech electronics the captain uses to safely operate and steer the vessels.



L to R, the dedicated crew: Deckhand Isaac Hodgson; Mate Marc Blodgett; Engineer Enrico (Rick) Ferroni; and Captain Ken Dassel. These guys are proud to work on these new vessels and help reduce energy costs for AVEC's members. Welcome to the AVEC family!



Mark Smith of Vitus Marine proudly provided a personal tour. The tug has beautiful woodwork throughout.



The comfortable dining area.

Photos by Amy Murphy and Mark Smith.



The vessels use an articulated-tug-barge system that increases maneuverability and efficiency. Amy Murphy and Graham MacDonald watch the tug's notch and pin connect to the barge.